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By Chris Azzopardi

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PRIDE SOURCE MEDIA GROUP

www.pridesource.com
Phone 734-263-1476

PUBLISHERS
Benjamin Jenkins
benjamin@pridesource.com

Tom Wesley
tom@pridesource.com

Publishers Emeritus: Jan Stevenson & Susan Horowitz

EDITORIAL
Editorial Director
Chris Azzopardi
chris@pridesource.com

Assistant Editor
Sarah Bricker Hunt

Senior Staff Writer
Jason A. Michael

Writers and Columnists
Ellen Knoppow, D'Anne Witkowski, Jon King, Gwendolyn Ann Smith, Dana Rudolph, Tim Retzloff, John Besche

CREATIVE
Cartoonists
Paul Berg

Graphic Designer
Sarah Wolf

Contributing Photographers
Andrew Potter, Andrew Cohen

ADVERTISING & SALES
Tom Wesley, 734-263-1476
tom@pridesource.com

Ann/Andy Cox, 248-613-2513
anncox@pridesource.com

National Advertising Representative
Rivendell Media, 212-242-6863

MEMBER OF
Michigan Press Assoication
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Lorenz has a lot of love for the Mitten, and he's proud to helm the state's efforts to market itself as welcoming to all travelers. He said that he would like to get to the point where the state is able to publish more materials marketed toward LGBTQ+ travelers, and in the meantime, Travel Michigan has been bringing in queer travel writers and influencers.

says that the breadth and depth of the campaign's coverage comes down to budget and time.

"We have a spring/summer guide and a fall/winter guide, and that's basically covering everything," Lorenz said. "So we generally have some kind of either a feature or a mention of something to do with LGBTQ+ and then same thing for things like travelers with disabilities and pet travel, child travel, senior travel. Our goal is to try to be welcoming to everybody, to provide some specificity for unique interests or individual interests, while at the same time providing information that would be beneficial for everyone."

In many respects, Lorenz is Mr. Michigan. His résumé boasts nine years at Meijer. He recently vacationed on Beaver Island, which he and dads everywhere will tell you is the only place in the U.S. to have been the residence of a monarch (Mormon leader James Jesse Strang). He even indirectly implies his un-coolness as a "straight white old guy" with a self-aware earnestness that forces a smile in response.

Lorenz has a lot of love for the Mitten, and he's proud to helm the state's efforts to market itself as welcoming to all travelers. He said that he would like to get to the point where the state is able to publish more materials marketed toward LGBTQ+ travelers, and in the meantime, Travel Michigan has been bringing in queer travel writers and influencers.

"The thing is, it's not as though we're saying, 'Hey, you are gay and you are welcome,' in advertising. We're just literally saying all are welcome … I admire those who will put together ads that are specifically targeting different groups. I think it's more important for us to be thoughtful of the thought that we are all the same in the most important and essential ways. We're all human. We all want to be loved. We all want to love, we all want to have freedom to travel. We all want to be able to be who we are and express who we are freely."

Lorenz said that he's experienced that sentiment in practice at queer destinations in Michigan. He recalls his stay in Saugatuck at The Dunes Resort, one of the largest LGBTQ+ resorts in the U.S., with particular fondness.

"Here I was a straight married guy, right? So I have these perceptions going in. And then when you go there, you see how welcome you are, as well," he said, recalling his visit.

Lorenz hopes that the same experience is possible for others, and he encourages it in his annual address to the travel agency at the Pure Michigan Governor's Conference on Tourism. The message of his speech, he says, focuses on Michigan "as [being] welcoming as possible in the most welcoming state in the country." It's also a call to action, as "we need to do more than just what's necessary legally, morally or whatever … Often the travel industry is the conscience of the community as well. We're the ones saying that 'Hey, for our industry to survive and for our community to prosper, we need to be thoughtful about these things.'"

Petals Sandcastle, founder and CEO of Ann Arbor's NOW Studios, disagrees. Sandcastle said that they don't believe Pure Michigan's scant LGBTQ+ content is a budget issue.

"It's pretty implausible," Sandcastle said. "Michigan is consistently listed as one of the worst states to live in as a queer person," Sandcastle said. "There's tolerance, and then there's celebration. This state is, at best, tolerant."

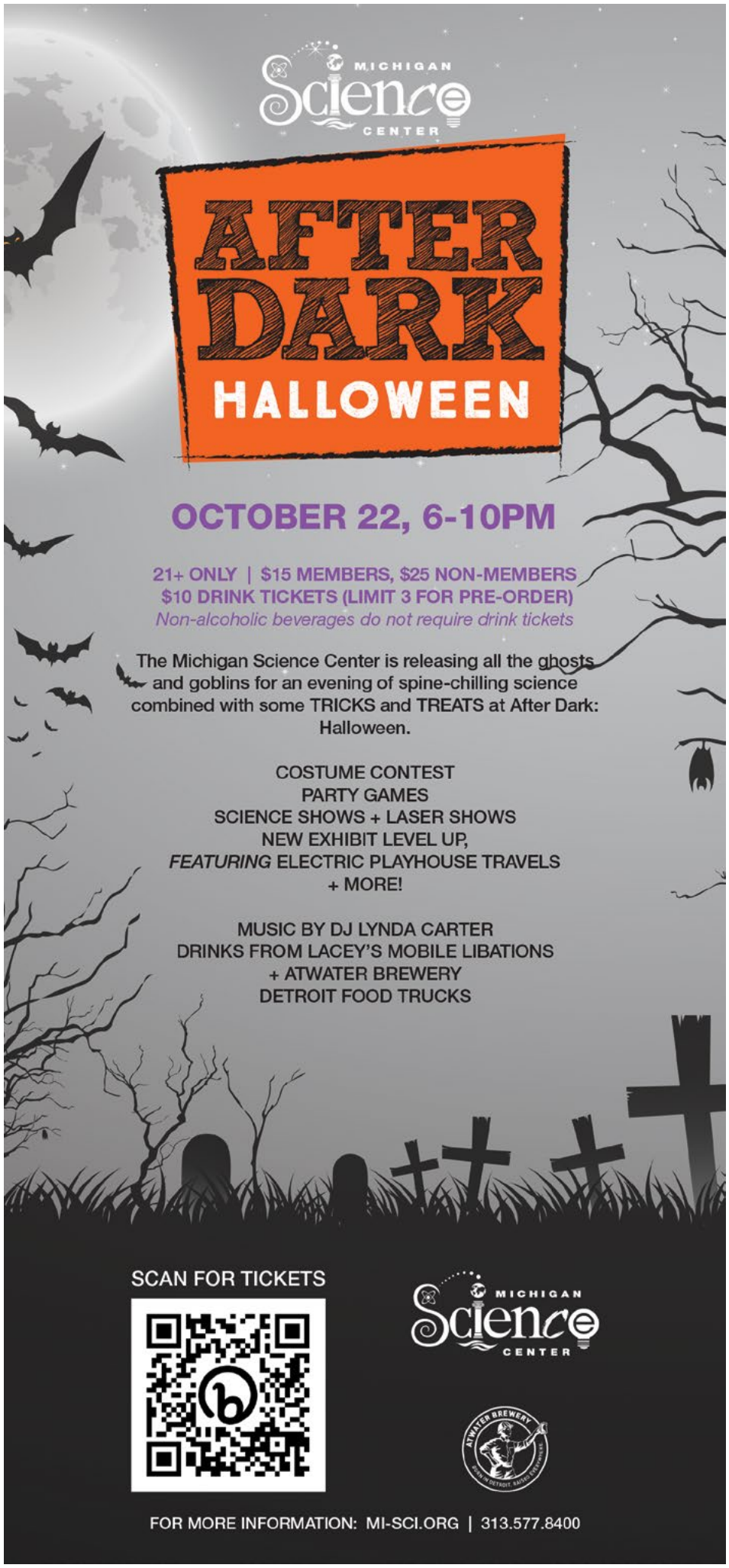
"We're a 501(c)(3) [nonprofit] that caters to marginalized communities," Sandcastle said.

Dave Lorenz. Photo courtesy of Dave Lorenz

"As a 501(c)(3) and a safe space, for us [the LGBTQ community], we haven't received any resources from any institution or government entity. Locally as well. The city council knows what we're up to, we've invited them to events. The organizations like us in the trenches that put out fascism and patriarchy's fires, there's never quite enough time for us."

Karen Hilt of Traverse City thinks the state hasn't met the mark. A board member of Up

See **Pure Michigan,** page 30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Billy Eichner and Luke Macfarlane in “Bros.” Photo: Universal Pictures

How **Optics and Inclusion** Tussle for Space in ‘Bros’

BY GEORGE ELKIND

“Not all gay people are nice,” says Bobby Leiber, played by Billy Eichner as the lead character in “Bros,” the new Judd Apatow-produced feature which Eichner also co-wrote and executive produced. As one of Bobby’s many corrective, prescriptive statements, the point is meant to give the new romantic comedy some teeth and currency, establishing daylight between “Bros” and more idealized (if often charged and tragic) depictions of queerness — and of white, cisgender gay men in particular.

In “Bros,” Bobby acts as the privileged public face of the LGBTQ+ community, a role that comes with a tangled set of responsibilities and anxieties. The film doesn’t try to hide that fact. Instead, it provides a space to examine the role of the cis white gay men it makes its subject, begging the question: What should cis white gay men do to not be part of the problem?

Whatever the answer, Bobby at first appears to be doing something right. Winning a (plainly comical) “Best Cis Male Gay Man” award and spearheading a fictional, first-of-its-kind National LGBTQ+ Museum in New York, he devotes his time to dredging up and presenting potentially lost but functionally obvious pieces of queer history, often with an archly righteous tone. (He lets us know who Marsha P. Johnson was, for instance). Working with a pointedly diverse, often bickering leadership committee at the museum and running a podcast highlighting often-ignored queer groups, the film positions him as a kind of intra-community ally. He’s doing his best by his peers but remains both lonely and in denial about that fact; despite his work, he’s unfulfilled.

Amid the film’s swirl of existential questions surrounding the societal role of cisgender white gay men, Bobby’s relationship status provides “Bros” with its other main concern, and a chance to dig into the personal and political contradictions of this experience. An anal-retentive intellectual at once fearful of intimacy and yearning for connection, the film opens with Bobby reacting to a a succession of anonymous, app-based flings. Bored with conversations rarely advancing past “what’s up” and transactional sex, Bobby finds himself caught in a cycle of emotionally repressed fumblings toward connection; in this depiction of mutually stunted inarticulacy, “Bros” makes this masculine tendency — call it classically male bullshit — another subject, dealing with the prevailing pressures queer men experience so acutely around gender performance.

Before long, Bobby meets an ex-hockey-playing hunk named Aaron (played with a welcome surplus of wit by Luke Macfarlane); with his swaggering, seemingly at-ease masculinity, he is a foil to Bobby’s own frail and anxious build and manner. For Bobby, attraction to Aaron constitutes a kind of political self-betrayal, a fraught fraternization with a culture of superficial and assimilationist queerness he resents while taking part in — and which runs counter to his progressive image of himself.

For the film’s publicly accepted cis, white gay men — who can move in New York society with relative freedom compared to those who suffered before them — the meaning of their identity becomes jumbled and unclear. Left with little to worry about materially from day to day, they become preoccupied even in romance with their own and others’ perceptions of themselves. They may be gay,

See **Bros,** page 18

Advice to Be Well

From Dr. Mark Bornstein and Dr. Paul Benson

I am a person living with HIV on a complicated multiple pill regimen. I'm tired of taking so many pills. I know other people with HIV taking one pill a day. Am I able to just take one pill? – JP

Dear JP,

Hi JP! This is a fantastic question. There have been significant advancements in HIV treatment, and I want to assure you that you have options. The first step is to work together with your provider to find out why you are on a complicated regimen.

Sometimes, someone is placed on these multi-pill regimens when there is some level of HIV resistance. This means that the strain of virus carries mutations that make some medications unable to attack the virus. Nonetheless, for the most common mutations causing HIV resistance, we typically are still able to use a single tablet regimen.

Occasionally, if someone does have a high level of resistance, a more unique and personalized regimen will have to be used in order to decrease the amount of virus in the body to undetected levels. Unfortunately, in some of these cases a single tablet regimen will not suffice and a multidrug regimen will have to be used.

The good news is that even if you fall into this category, there are still options! At Be Well Medical Center, we conduct clinical trials where we get to enroll patients into studies with new medications that are currently being examined. These are typically medications that are the newest available and most recently studied. We currently have studies that are looking into simplifying complicated HIV regimens with a new single tablet medication that has not been released yet. By enrolling in the studies, you get to take these medications at no cost and also are doing the service of helping the HIV community by further advancing our understanding of these new medications.

I welcome you to contact us at the Be Well Medical Center to continue this discussion.

There is so much information about the number of time-sensitive vaccinations available right now that I have become totally confused and skeptical. Can you provide me with some guidance about what I should do? – DE

Dear DE,

You are right. Your question could not have come at a better time. It's flu season right now. It is the perfect time to get vaccinated for the flu. Each year the vaccine changes a bit to match the predicted strain of flu for each year's flu season. Flu vaccination is recommended for everyone. For those with health problems or the elderly, prevention of the flu with a vaccination can save your life.

Last month a new Covid vaccine became available that has activity against the old and new strains of Covid. Even if you have had Covid or have been fully vaccinated with two initial vaccinations and two boosters, this new vaccine should still be considered. Caution is advised if you had Covid or had a Covid vaccination less than two months before receiving this new bivalent vaccine. If you get the new vaccine soon after, you are most likely going to have a reaction to the vaccine. This reaction may include a localized injection site reaction or symptoms of fatigue, muscle aches and fevers for a couple of days. We have seen more reactions from this new bivalent vaccine. I don't think it's from the vaccine itself, but from immunity from previous Covid vaccinations or the disease itself producing natural immunity. These reactions are not life threatening.

The monkeypox vaccine is available, and in much better supply. It is for those at high risk. This includes men having sex with men and having multiple partners or a monogamous person with a partner that has multiple partners. If you are a gay man without these risk factors, it is probably not necessary at this time. If you had close contact with someone that has monkeypox, that is also an indication to get vaccinated ASAP to possibly avoid getting monkeypox yourself. This post-exposure vaccination can reduce symptoms or even prevent infection. This vaccination is given in two doses one month apart. As the vaccine supply increases, which it will, the recommendations of who should get vaccinated for monkeypox will expand. The great news is that the number of monkeypox cases is decreasing in Michigan and around the country. If you have already had monkeypox, you should not get the vaccination.

Consider these time-sensitive vaccinations, too:

- HPV — for preventing genital warts, especially the strains that can progress to cancer.
- Pneumonia — for everyone over the age of 65, or at any age if the person has a chronic disease including but not limited to HIV.
- Tetanus — every ten years.
- Shingles — after the age of 50.
- Hepatitis A and B — at any age. You can get a blood test to see if you need the Hepatitis A or B vaccinations.

Although it is safe, I personally do not recommend getting more than one vaccine on any one particular day unless there is a compelling reason to do so. The reason I don't like giving more than one vaccine at a time is that the risk of having a reaction increases. Again, this is a personal decision that can be made together with your healthcare provider.

Vaccination is a great thing that has reduced infections and mortality from a number of infections. Polio and smallpox are examples of that. Some individuals believe we are being over vaccinated. Vaccinations are generally safe, however in rare cases they can cause problems greater than a short-term reaction. Vaccines will probably have its place in HIV eradication as well.

I hope this helps!

Since 1980 Dr. Paul Benson's Be Well Medical Center has been an inclusive medical center celebrating diversity. Do you have a health related question for Dr. Paul Benson and Dr. Mark Bornstein? Submit your questions to bewelladvice@pridesource.com. This article is a sponsored editorial produced in collaboration with Be Well Medical Center. Between The Lines's journalism is made possible with the support and partnership of advertisers like Be Well. Learn more about Be Well from their ad below.

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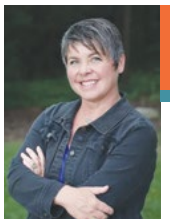
Meshawn Maddock Should Resign For Her Homophobic Comments Against Pete Buttigieg



By Betsy Coffia

Last month, Michigan GOP Co-Chair Meshawn Maddock targeted U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg with a homophobic tweet, calling him a "weak little girl" while mocking his move to Michigan. Despite widespread condemnation of her tweet, including from Secretary Buttigieg himself, she is doubling down on her homophobic comments.

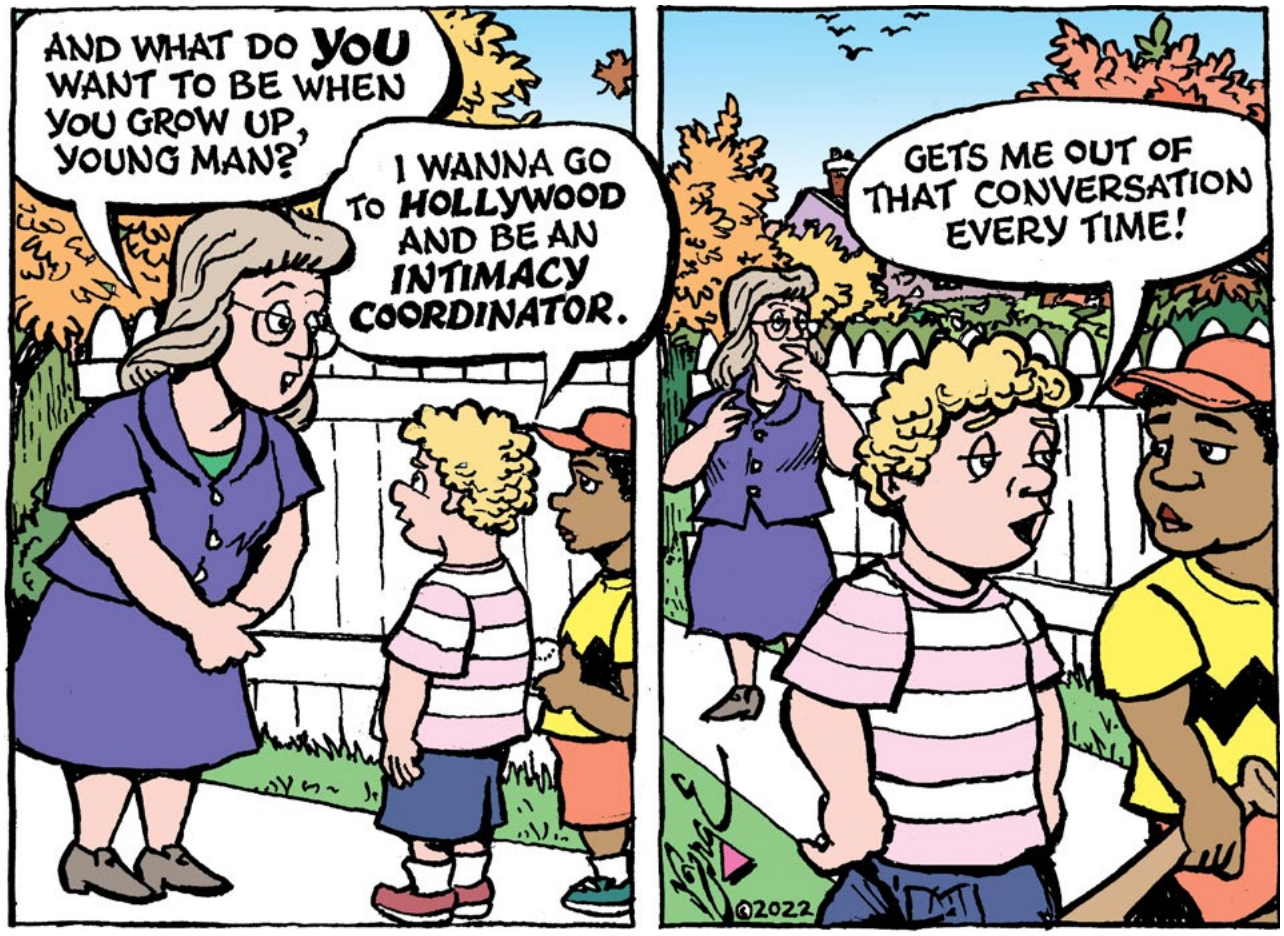
I'm a county commissioner and state representative candidate in Pete Buttigieg's home House District 103. I'm proud to have Pete, Chasten and their family return to Chasten's hometown in Traverse City.

Maddock, on the other hand, should resign because attacks on LGTBQ+ people should have no home in Michigan. But I'm not holding my breath. Maddock's ugly homophobia is, despicably, right at home in the Michigan Republican Party.

In the past year alone, Republican State Senator Lana Theis baselessly alleged that State Sen. Mallory McMorrow wanted to "groom and sexualize kindergarteners" because she stood up for LGBTQ+ youth. Media organizations uncovered Republican secretary of state candidate Kristina Karamo's history of blatant homophobic comments, including calling LGBTQ+ supporters "the enemy" and "agents of the devil." Further, State Senate Republicans blocked a resolution designating June as Pride Month, even though the resolution was identical to one that passed a year earlier. The list of bigotry goes on and on.

The escalating homophobic attacks from Republican leaders have real consequences for our communities. In August, residents in Jamestown Township, Michigan, voted to defund their public library because it refused to censor certain LGBTQ+ authors.

See **Pete Buttigieg,** next page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Not Outing Kids to Their Parents Is in Best Interest of LGBTQ+ Students

By Owen Bondono

Editor's Note: Recently, Republican governor candidate Tudor Dixon and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer weighed in on Michigan Department of Education (MDE) training that touches on parental notification as it relates to LGBTQ+ students. MDE urges caution in these situations. Dixon called on Michigan State Superintendent Michael Rice to resign, while Whitmer responded with a letter to MDE urging the agency to make changes that "continue bringing parents' perspectives into the work you do."

When parents send their children to school, they expect learning spaces where their children are cared for and kept safe. Children who are physically and emotionally safe are more likely to learn, thrive and achieve positive educational outcomes. For transgender and gender nonconforming youth, using names and pronouns they prefer is part of what makes them feel safe and seen, which fosters successful school environments.

In a perfect world, every family would be supportive of their transgender/gender nonconforming children and teachers would work in partnership with parents to make sure that safety is felt both at home and school. Unfortunately, we live in a world where, according to youth.gov, LGBTQ+ young people are significantly overrepresented in the homeless population, and the number one cause of this homelessness is family rejection. This is one reason why the MDE, in its guidance on supporting LGBTQ+ students, recommends caution when a student has not come out to their families. Schools are encouraged to not only consider the responsibility to keep parents informed, but to foremost "consider the health, safety, and well-being of the student."

Stand with Trans agrees with MDE — when a student is expressing thoughts of self-harm or suicide, these concerns must be reported to parents in ways that do not disclose the student's gender identity unless the student has given permission. If a student does not feel safe disclosing that information to their parents, forcing them to share — or sharing without their consent —may only serve to increase their stress, possibly causing an increase in self-harm. It is disheartening to see the misinterpretation of MDE training materials and the suggestion that teachers do just that.

Stand with Trans' mission is "to empower and support transgender youth and their loved ones." We know from direct experience that many families are not initially equipped to support their transgender or gender nonconforming children, and that many children come out to peers, teachers and school counselors before coming out to their parents. Stand with Trans provides programs and services to support transgender youth, their parents and families, and their allies. Our organization provides youth with spaces where they belong and helps to extend that belonging into the most important places in their lives. We agree with MDE regarding the importance of keeping transgender and

See **Stand With Trans,** next page

◂ Pete Buttigieg

Continued from previous page

These attacks also send a clear and dangerous message to our youth. In Traverse City Area Public Schools, for example, students started a discriminatory social media group that included anti-LGBTQ+ messages. When LGBTQ+ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers in the United States, hateful rhetoric — particularly from our political leaders — jeopardizes the safety of LGBTQ+ people and their right to live without fear or discrimination.

Instead of hurling insults and further marginalizing the LGBTQ+ community, let's focus on the real issues facing Michigan families and build communities where everyone can thrive. Communities where LGBTQ+ rights are protected, women have the right to reproductive freedom without government interference, and children and teachers are safe at school.

We must also create communities where all Michiganders have quality health care and affordable housing and child care, no matter their zip code, race or gender. As someone who grew up in a working class family that struggled to access these basic necessities, I know that these reforms are desperately needed.

For too long, political leaders like Meshawn Maddock have tried to divide us to prevent us from expecting more of our leaders. We won't stand for it any longer.

Michiganders want leaders who respect everyone and celebrate the diversity that makes us stronger, not leaders who perpetuate bigotry that endangers people's lives. We must demand better and settle for nothing less than leaders who work for all Michiganders.

Betsy Coffia is a Grand Traverse County commissioner and Democratic state representative candidate in the 103rd district.

◂ Stand With Trans

Continued from previous page

gender nonconforming students safe in schools.

In the words of our support specialist, Vic, a transgender college student: "If I was in a space where my trans identity was exposed to my parents/caregivers without my consent, I would be petrified and heartbroken. I would have lost trust in staff who crossed my boundaries and put me in more danger by exposing information unnecessarily. Coming out is such a complex personal journey, and it is unfair to share such private information against someone's wishes. So many trans youth are in unaccepting or unsafe living situations, where coming out could cost them their protection and housing. I would not want school staff to share my transgender identity with anyone I hadn't given permission to know."

S'Niyah, another young transgender staff member at Stand with Trans, says: "If I was at school and was out as trans, I wouldn't want the school outing me to my parents without my consent. Other trans youth and I have our own path for telling our families about our transitions based on our life situations, which the school isn't aware of. If a trans kid is outed to their parents when they're not ready, that will cause unbelievable levels of stress and anxiety for them because they either aren't sure about how their parents will react or know they'll react negatively."

For educators and those working in schools, please talk with your students before taking action. Take the time to understand the home situation and if sharing with the parent is safe for the child. When children are in school, they count on physical and emotional safety; they count on trusted adults to be their advocates. Parents and school staff should be a team in supporting all children, and Stand with Trans commends the Michigan Department of Education for allowing schools the freedom to best support transgender and gender nonconforming students.

Owen Bondono is a Stand with Trans board member. This Op-Ed is co-signed by Executive Director Roz Keith, Stand with Trans Board of Directors and Stand with Trans Staff.

CREEP OF THE WEEK

Don't Mess With Texas Because Texas Is Busy Messing With You

By D'Anne Witkowski

In the United States, everybody knows that you don't mess with Texas. That's because you don't have to. Texas will undoubtedly mess with you.

Honestly, you could just be someone who needs, say, electricity on a regular and reliable basis and Texas is most definitely messing with you. Their dusty ass power grid is featured in the opening scene of 1985's "Back to the Future." And it hasn't been updated since.

But the "messing" part is especially true if you're a part of a marginalized group. Transgender people and their families have been the target of oppression for a long time. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton has been obsessed with transgender people for years, specifically obsessed with limiting trans rights.

You'll remember Paxton from hits like "parents of trans kids are guilty of child abuse" and "the Supreme Court's ruling in favor of marriage equality lawless so Texas clerks should just keep on discriminating" and "I'm coming for Target because they let trans people use their toilets." And the hits just keep on coming!

Way back in 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court heard a case called Bostock v. Clayton County involving people who were fired for being LGBTQ+. The Court found that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects LGBTQ+ employees against discrimination.

And so that was that and no one was ever discriminated against for being LGBTQ+ ever again. The end.

Haha. If only.

Paxton filed a suit saying because, as I mentioned, he is obsessed with discriminating against LGBTQ+ people. And a federal judge just ruled in Paxton's favor, saying that the Bostock v. Clayton County ruling goes too far.

U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, a judge that Donald Trump appointed and whose last name I would wager that Trump could absolutely not pronounce, issued the ruling.

According to the Advocate, Kacsmaryk wrote that employers "do not have to allow workers to use the restrooms corresponding to their gender identity or dress according to that identity, nor do they have to use employee's preferred pronouns."

Literally the least an employer can do for their employees is let them pee in peace and bother to learn their names or pronouns. But OK.

It should be noted that when Kacsmaryk was confirmed to a lifetime appointment in 2019 his anti-LGBTQ+ positions were well known.

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), in a press release responding to Kacsmaryk's nomination, said he was "among the most anti-LGBTQ judicial nominees put forward by the Trump-Pence administration."

"He has a long history of virulently anti-LGBTQ opinions and positions — including his deeply disturbing opposition to same-sex marriage, his vocal hostility towards legal protections for gender identity and sexual orientation, and his shocking refusal to recognize the basic humanity of transgender people," said HRC Legal Director Sarah Warbelow after the confirmation. "Kacsmaryk fails the basic expectation of impartiality and commitment to equality under the law that we demand of every member of the bench."

Also according to HRC, "Kacsmaryk has implied that transgender people are 'delusional,' opposed the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's position that sexual orientation and gender identity are covered under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, publicly slammed non-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people throughout his career, and in opposing aspects of LGBTQ equality like same-sex marriage, has derisively dismissed equality as unwanted symptoms of a 'sexual revolution.'"

This guy was so bad that even Susan Collins was like, "Uh, no." EVEN SUSAN COLLINS.

Bears repeating that this guy was appointed by Trump. FOR LIFE. Hashtag Elections Matter God Damn It.

Needless to say, Paxton is super happy that his partner-in-hate Kacsmaryk ruled in his favor.

A press release from the Texas AG office reads, "Attorney General Paxton has secured another major victory over the Biden Administration" because Paxton considers being able to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people a "major victory."

"The court decision is not only a win for the rule of law, but for the safety and protection of Texas children," Paxton says in the release. "The Biden administration's attempts to radicalize federal law to track its woke political beliefs are beyond dangerous. I will continue to push back against these unlawful attempts to use federal agencies to normalize extremist positions that put millions of Texans at risk."

Paxton will continue to push back against normalizing extremist positions like "transgender people are human beings with feelings."

And what, exactly, are "millions of Texans" at risk for? It's unconscionable to paint transgender people as some kind of threat. The real extremist threat in Texas is Paxon. He must go.

Rochelle Garza, running against Paxton, is an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights. Check her out at rochellegarzafortexas.com and donate if you can.

It's Time for a Queer Host on 'The Daily Show'

5 Comedians Qualified to Take Trevor Noah's Seat

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Trevor Noah, longtime host of "The Daily Show with Trevor Noah," says he will leave the show after seven years, opening up an opportunity for a fresh voice to fill that influential role.

In a tumultuous political climate where LGBTQ+ issues are the hot potato that terrible politicians love to bat back and forth, who better to provide pithy commentary than a queer comedian? We nominate these five rising stars and veteran funny people.

Patti Harrison

Kate McKinnon. Photo: ABC

Jon Stewart laid the groundwork, Noah carried the torch and Patti Harrison, the whip-smart, take-no-shit comedian (who got kicked off Twitter for hilariously impersonating Sia as Nilla Wafers — yes the cookies) will bring it home for a new generation.

At 31, Harrison is a vocal member of the young millennial and Gen Z generation and an out transwoman, which means she understands what's at stake for her generation's future and can speak powerfully against the recent alarming national political and social backslide into the 1950s. She is also the comedian most likely to take the audience on Andy Kaufman-esque rides to unexpected places, something we can get behind.

Kate McKinnon

Lesbian heroine McKinnon is a no-brainer to replace Noah. The veteran "SNL" actor left the show this year after a decade playing a laundry list of audience favorites, but her tenure there might be most linked to her earnest, deeply funny impersonation of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. We'd love to see her drop some Ginsburns on some well-deserving political figures.

There's more to McKinnon than her epic RBG portrayal, too. Remember when she channeled what every non-Trump voting American was feeling when Hillary Clinton lost in 2016? Her post-election cold open, as Clinton singing Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" was as cathartic as it was powerful — a reminder to cherish what we had and a call to gather strength for the battles yet to come at an unprecedented moment in history (no matter what Rob Schneider thinks). Add McKinnon's universal likability and she's a candidate for the job who would be uniquely positioned to serve as a bridge between constantly warring political factions.

Wanda Sykes

Wanda Sykes' trademark no-nonsense takes on current events (and takedowns of current idiots) would liven up the "Daily Show" desk. She's been at this for a while, too. Take her "Daily Show with Jon Stewart" appearance way back in 2001, where she took down then president George W. Bush, remarking, "I pray for the man every day… and I advise everybody else to do the same. We in trouble, Jon! We are in trouble. It's the foreign policy — the man has only left the country twice, and that was to Mexico. I have traveled more than the president. That's a problem."

Twenty years later, Sykes has remained relevant (and side-splittingly funny) and has been an active political rabble rouser. There's no doubt a Sykes-led "Daily Show" would be well-written, pithy, pointedly sassy and devoid of fluff. Sykes would just get the job done while casually annihilating people who casually support stances like eliminating queer rights.

Bowen Yang

Another "SNL" standout, Yang has been coming into his own over the past year, as evidenced by runaway Hulu hit "Fire Island." But it's his off-the-cuff takes in interviews that reveal why he'd make an excellent "Daily Show" host. When BTL editorial director Chris Azzopardi interviewed Yang this summer, he discussed the "SNL" sketch "Pride Month Song," a fresh look at a queer culture staple. Ever down-to-earth, Yang said, "...Pride is kind of exhausting. And it's kind of not what you expect it to be: You think it's gonna be this amazing thing and it actually ends up being really stressful and logistically a nightmare and someone has a meltdown at some point."

It's that kind of Midwestern-via-New-York authenticity that contributes to Yang's cross-cultural appeal. It would be compelling to see Bowen breaking down complicated

Wanda Sykes. Photo: Netflix

news events in a way we can all understand and identify with. Yang is a master at keeping it real.

Randy Rainbow

Maybe it's time for "The Daily Show" to become a variety show. Randy Rainbow's snarky political musical theater might just be magical in the way it lures listeners in with familiar Broadway intros and then whacks them over the head with laser-targeted observations about terrible people. Sometimes, a spoonful of sugar really does help the medicine go down. And at a time when we can all agree that real world news is almost too much to comprehend some days, we could use a little sugar, especially when it's spice in disguise.

It would be interesting to see Rainbow approach the "Daily Show" anchor desk with a Colbert-esque approach, where we're never quite sure if he's serious, but we're definitely sure he's killing fascists with every expertly crafted lyrical delight.

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The Stonewall Inn. Photo: Jason Villemez

Stonewall Firsthand: Sorting Stubborn Myths from Reality

Dispelling 6 Common Claims About Stonewall

BY MARK SEGAL

For years, people have debated what actually happened that night in June 1969 when the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York City was raided and a new, more militant struggle for equality was born. Due to the debates — and insistence of some who claim they knew all aspects of what had actually happened — an incredible void opened up where people could invent, imagine or distort Stonewall and our history to their own objectives. The myths of the Stonewall Riots (or the "Stonewall Uprising," as it's often called) are endless, but they're easily dispelled when you look at the material proof and plain logic.

1. Judy Garland's death and funeral did not cause Stonewall.

The myth of Judy Garland's death being the impetus for Stonewall is the most belittling to those of us who participated. It's stereotypical and self-loathing, and with this article we add new information which finally ends this silly tale.

One clue is where the idea originated: from a conservative, straight columnist at the Village Voice named Howard Smith, who actually was a friend of the police captain who led the raid.

Simple logic says it's just not so. People of my age — late teens and early 20s at the time — were not dancing to Judy Garland in the Stonewall Inn. We were dancing to Diana Ross, Beatles and Barbra Streisand. My best memory is dancing to the Fifth Dimension song "Let the Sunshine In," which is from the musical "Hair." Judy Garland was of an older generation. We wanted to dance our asses off when we were in Stonewall, and that you didn't do to Garland's music.

But the final nail in the Judy Garland myth are articles about the funeral at Campbell's Funeral home. If you look at the photos and reports in The New York Times, as well as other newspaper reports, you'll note that the subjects in the photos, as well as the majority of quotes, are from housewives. When you look more closely for the very few men in the photos, they're in suits and ties. We all know that is not the kind of person who fought at Stonewall. Men who wore suits and ties ran from the police for fear of losing their good paying jobs (or their families finding out about them).

It's time to bury the Judy Garland myth for good. The myth makes Stonewall sound like the only riot in U.S. history making its participants fight for a silly cause. The truth is that we were fighting the hate and oppression of the police that night. We were not empowered by a dead singer. Let's put that coffin into the ground already.

2. Nobody knows exactly how many people were at Stonewall.

I was recently filming a BBC television show in front of the Stonewall when a tour group came by. The guide stated "There were 105 people in the bar that night." But nobody can possibly know how many people were there. Some people paid for entry and some were regulars that were let in without the door charge. Still, that number does give an idea of the average size of the crowd inside.

As we all know, once people were let outside, those with any standing in society ran for the hills as soon as they could. Those of us who remained — street kids, drag queens (later to be called trans), people of color and the

verging radical gay youth of the day — gathered around the door in a semi circle.

There were hundreds of passersby and even more who craned their necks from a distance. That night went on for hours, so anyone who was within a few blocks could say they were at Stonewall that night. But actually participating is another matter. Anyone who says they know how many people were there must not have actually been there, since it occurred in various areas of Christopher Street and around Christopher Street. You don't take a roll call in the middle of a riot.

Those people who tossed stones or cans of soda, or those wrote on the streets and walls "Tomorrow Night Stonewall" as I did, all went on to be a part of Gay Liberation Front (GLF), which arose from the ashes of Stonewall. Some GLF members were there during the first night. Other GLF members stood and spoke from the doors of the closed Stonewall the second night. More GLF members began leafleting the following nights.

So who can we say was there? Well, anyone who had family in the area or a decent job ran for the subway or a cab as soon as they were let out of the bar. Who was left? Drag queens, stereotypical men and women, street kids like me who were homeless or living at the YMCA, and young activists like Marty Robinson. Since the riot created the the urgency for change, Gay Liberation Front picked up that mantle and ran with it. Stonewall and GLF are synonymous. When asked who was there at Stonewall, my answer is: Who was there the following night and the night after that? Who carried out that change through that first turbulent year? We have pictures and written accounts. This is no myth. There are facts in plain sight.

Gay Liberation Front members Jerry Hoose (left), Mark Segal (right), and Sylvia Rivera (background, holding a bag) at a GLF demonstration against New York University. Photo: Diana Davies collection, New York Public Library

3. Stonewall lasted several days, and then an entire year.

There have been numerous suggestions about how long Stonewall lasted. At one museum I was speaking at — during the opening of their Stonewall Rising exhibit — they had a sign which stated one number. Then, someone else wrote about the exhibit and put another number. When I'm asked that question, I say confidently that Stonewall went on for 365 days, from the first night until the first Pride one year later. That spirit in June 1969 carried on with the changes that Gay Liberation brought from it. We were self-identifying ourselves for the first time in history. We were out, loud and proud rather than in the closet.

We took back our streets from the police. We organized legal and medical alerts. We had social and political meetings. All of that threatened the police, since much of it was illegal for "homosexuals," and we did it in plain sight and even advertised it. We dared the police to stop us.

One last thing: We were diversified and inclusive. It took 365 days to create that change.

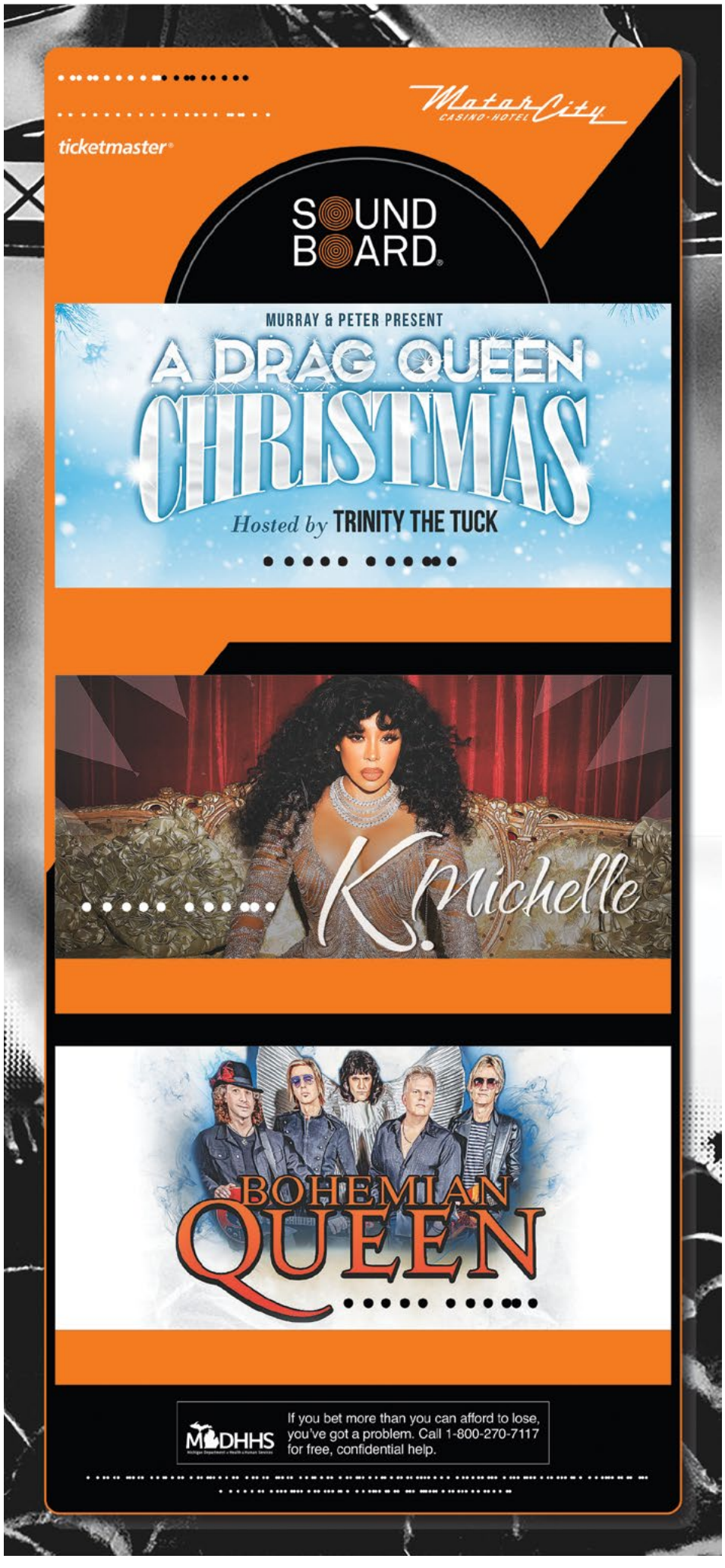
4. There was no brick.

It is often stated that my fellow GLF member, Sylvia Rivera, threw the first brick. Although it's flashy and bombastic, that myth actually does not give her her rightful place in history. Both Sylvia and her GLF sister Marsha P. Johnson have spoken about where they were during Stonewall, and people today have either ignored their words or distorted them.

What cannot be disputed is that Sylvia and Marsha did something much more important than throwing an imaginary brick. They created the world's first trans organization, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR). STAR gave visibility and Pride to the trans community for the first time in history. STAR was not one night but an entire movement. Sylvia is more of a historical figure for co-creating that first trans organization than for being just one of a crowd at Stonewall. That cannot be disputed.

If you're still hung up on the brick idea, The

See **Stonewall Myths,** page 18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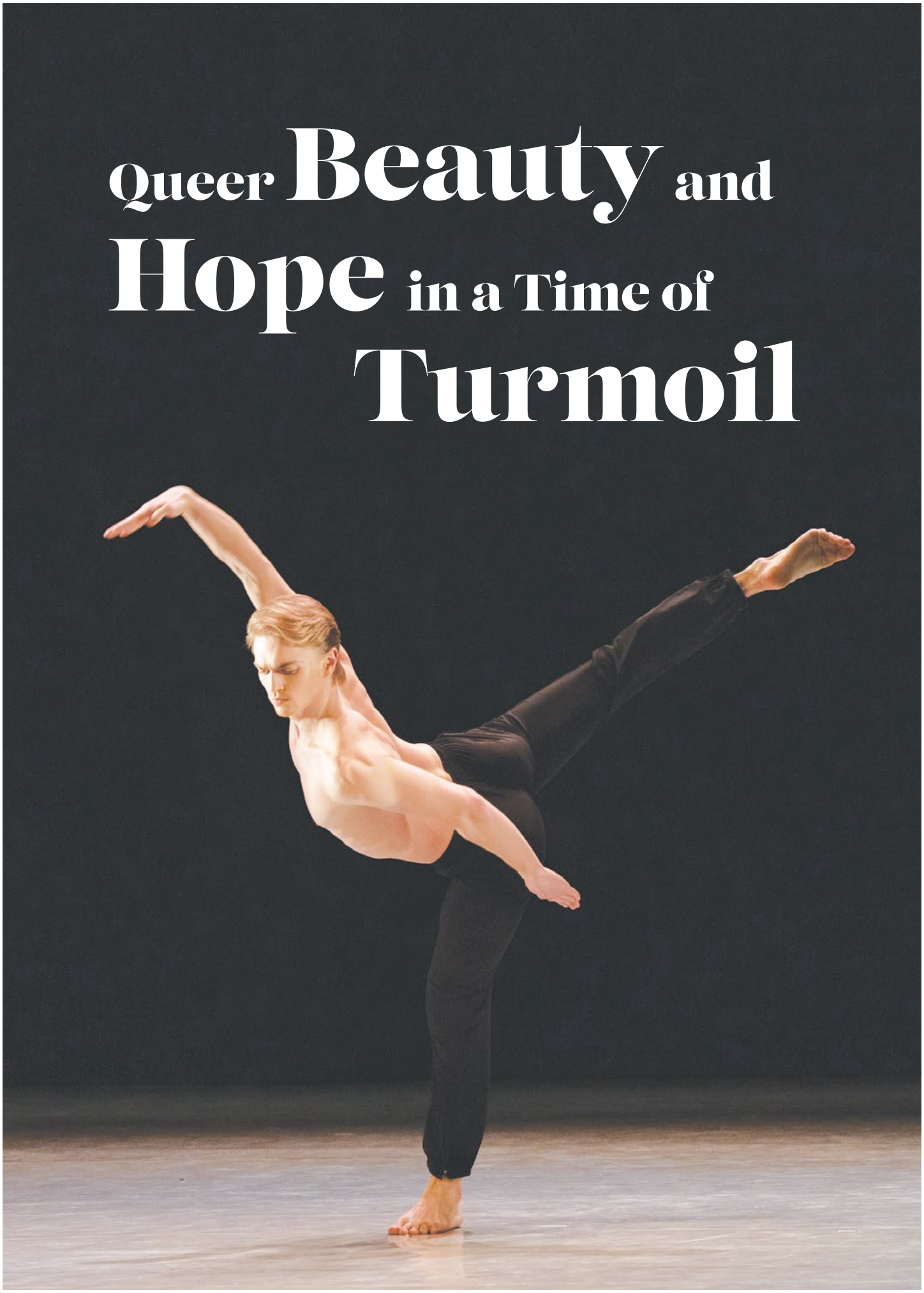


A dancer in the Kyiv City Ballet. Photo courtesy of Music Hall

Kyiv City Ballet Visits Detroit

BY ELLEN SHANNA KNOPPOW

More than seven months ago, on Feb. 23, the Kyiv City Ballet left their country for a long-planned European tour. The following day, Russia invaded Ukraine. Unable to return home, the company has been sheltering in France and Great Britain since their departure. A tour of the United States was added later, the first in the company's 10-year history.

On Sept. 27 the Detroit Opera and Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts partnered to present the company on Music Hall's Main Stage. The stated purpose of the program, titled "Tribute to Peace," is to offer a voice of resistance and a voice of hope. They remain defiant in the face of Putin's attempts to extinguish Ukrainian culture.

As a newcomer to the world of ballet performance, I went in unsure of what to expect, but Julie Gervais, development director of Music Hall, offered some direction. A former dancer herself, Gervais stressed that there are no "wrong" interpretations of dance.

The first piece, "Thoughts," centered on a male dancer accompanied by several other members of the company clad in beige, shapeless costumes. One female dancer in white appears elusive to him. Punctuated at times by indecipherable whispering, it conjured feelings of loneliness amidst a mass of others.

"It felt very reflective to me," Gervais said of the modern piece. "And really interesting to see. We see a lot of contemporary choreography at the Music Hall because we specialize in that. But we don't often see it done by companies from eastern Europe. And so to see an eastern European company have the opportunity to take on contemporary material, it had a different resonance. I felt it wasn't heavy, but it wasn't exactly light either."

The second piece, "Tribute to Peace," felt nostalgic. Set to music by Edward Elgar and with a changing impressionistic backdrop along with one park bench on stage, pairs of dancers whose costumes brought to mind previous eras were featured in distinct vignettes. They interacted unencumbered by the horrors of war and all find love in the end. This work was choreographed by Kyiv City Ballet artistic director Ivan Kozlov and his wife, associate director Ekaterina Kozlova, specifically for the United States tour.

Jenny Feterovich was moved by the performance as well. Feterovich is a founder of Real Help for Ukraine, a Michigan-based nonprofit that provides direct aid to various humanitarian projects as the war rages. All proceeds from the Detroit concert benefit

the charity.

"It's definitely very emotional," said Feterovich, in response to the performance. Feterovich is Russian American and her wife is from Kyiv. "I'm glad to see that they're out touring and performing around the world and bringing a piece of their culture. But at the same time, of course, it's painful to watch this. Because somewhere their friends, their relatives and their families are still in the midst of a very, very large war."

As if to illustrate this harrowing reality, one of the ballet company's former principal dancers was killed on the battlefield just weeks ago. Oleksandr Shapoval was 47.

"We still have family there, friends there, our employees are there," Feterovich continued. "So we've been extremely involved with on-the-ground [efforts] inside the country, supporting people in every single way we can in the grassroots type of way. And specifically, we're definitely supporting LGBTQ community."

"When you look at what these dancers are going through," Gervais said, "and they're dancing these little tableaux, I would call them, little bits of stories, [it's] looking at how beautiful life is in peace time: the freedom that you have to go to the park, to take a walk, to greet somebody, to bring them a gift — just all these beautiful daily things that we have the freedom to do that they don't have the freedom to do. And so I found that one really poignant."

Especially poignant in one tableau was the interaction of two playful, potentially flirtatious men. Wearing contrasting but complementary pants, shirts and vests, the characters' relationship felt like a budding romance. Consider that the piece ends with one of the young dancers lifting the other onto their hip in what looks like a celebration of love. Gervais noticed the couple, too.

"Whether it's what the choreographer meant to communicate, I guess you'd have to ask that person," Gervais conceded. "I don't feel like I can speak for him, but I saw it too. And I was happy to see it because LGBTQ rights in eastern European countries have, probably, not come along as quickly as anybody would like. And so to express same-sex love in a ballet, it shows that they're feeling like they can speak freely through their art."

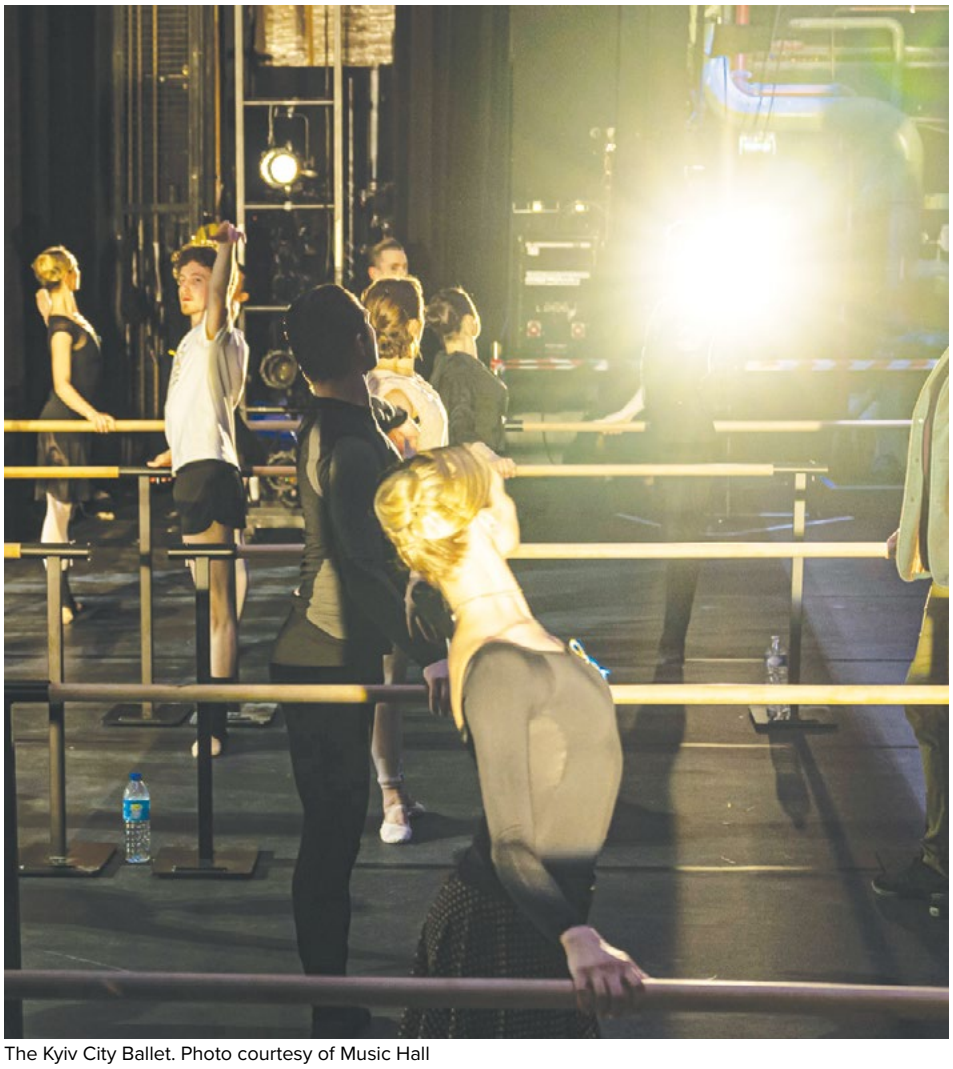
Feterovich was wowed as well.

"I was blown away by that," Feterovich said about the perceived gay couple. "I was like, wow, they're on stage, they're doing this and this is what it represents."

Lenny Emson, executive director of KyivPride, warned that the ballet company is a state-sponsored organization and that, in his homophobic and transphobic country, any queer dancers would likely be closeted.

Ukraine does not have marriage equality, nor can same-sex couples adopt. Conversion

See **Kyiv Ballet,** page 24



The Kyiv City Ballet. Photo courtesy of Music Hall

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New York Times did a video dispelling it in 2019.

5. Who created the first Gay Pride?

Here is an answer that is well-documented and known by each of us who lived this history: The two people who actually came up with the idea of Pride were Craig Rodwell and Ellen Broidy. They were having dinner in Craig's apartment with their partners at the time, and they began putting down a resolution that would be read at the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations meeting in Philadelphia. That resolution created the Christopher Street Gay Liberation committee, which went on to organize that first Pride one year after Stonewall.

It is often reported that the "mother" of Gay Pride is Brenda Howard. That is absolutely false. There are numerous members of Gay Liberation Front or Christopher Street Gay Liberation committee who are alive today. We know who created Pride because we were there when it took shape.

If anyone is going to be deemed "mother of Pride," it's Ellen Broidy. Brenda Howard was a member of GLF, but she was not in any way associated with the formation of that first Pride other than to march in it. She may have someone editing Wikipedia on her behalf, but that doesn't make that falsehood any less false.

6. The most accurate history of Stonewall is a collective one.

There are many views of Stonewall, but the majority of its participants went on to form GLF. We are the spirit of Stonewall. Each GLF member who was there relies on their personal memories, and those memories collectively weave a fuller picture. Numerous books on the subject have been written. There are two books that stand out: The first book written on the subject was Donn Teal's "The Gay Militants" in 1971, the other is David Carter's "Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution" published in 2010. While Carter's version has some flaws, it comes closer to any version, before or after. He wrote at a time when our community was beginning to realize the importance of Stonewall historically and at a time that many different viewpoints took hold. He literally had to duck to keep out of the way of warring parties on the subject, which can be read about in other books.

Carter continued to research the issue and had a passion for finding the missing points and bringing facts forward until his death in 2020. Others (who were not at Stonewall, mind you) unfortunately write with their bias at the forefront. Many of us who were there continue to pass on lost information or leads. We feel that our personal battle that night has been used to reinforce people's own misconceptions and political objectives.

It wasn't that single night that changed and built our community. It was from the ashes of that night that Gay Liberation Front created self-identity, community and Pride. Change doesn't happen overnight. In this case, the seeds of equality took 365 days to take root. It was that first magical year of gay liberation.

Mark Segal is an award-winning journalist, author and Stonewall pioneer. More information on his 50-plus years of continuous activism can be found at marksegalstonewall.com.

Hamill: Come In, Herman – page 3

the village VOICE 15c

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SOME GRAFFITI

IN FRONT OF THE STONEWALL

'Gifted Offenders': I

Completing the Education Of the Black Ex-Convict

by Bell Gale Chevigny

In February, 1967, I was asked to teach an evening class in English composition at Queens College to a group of parolees. They were to be taught under the auspices of the state-supported program for the disadvantaged, SEEK (an acronym for the rather fulsome Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge). Joseph Mulholland, director of SEEK, which was then half a year old, had been a probation officer and located the students through old associates on the parole board. There would be eight students in their 20s and 30s—all men, all but one black. I was teaching at Sarah Lawrence at the time, and the offer presented an irresistible contrast in every respect, quite apart from the extraordinary personal and educational challenge it held in itself.

But the challenge took on a shape I had hardly anticipated. The first evening we met I tried to find out where we stood by asking each in turn what he had enjoyed reading. Except for the two who began with magazines and worked their way up to "Marjorie Morningstar" and "The Fountainhead," they had done a good deal of reading in current black literature. Then, when it was his turn, a raspy young man, sprawling over his tiny chair and filling the space around him with expansive gestures, off-handedly listed all of Baldwin and LeRoi Jones, some Genet and Beckett—apologizing parenthetically for not understanding "Watt"—named Celine and Dahlberg, and paused. Before I could respond, a more compact and stationary figure across the room volunteered, "I've read most of that. And Hesse, I liked "Steppenwolf" especially." The long man straightened slightly in his chair: "I forgot Gertrude Stein—she's the best." "Have you read 'Les Mots' by Sartre?" the other countered, adding softly, "That's 'The Words' in English." "Not yet," the first replied, keeping his cool, "but I read 'Nausea,' " "Nausea,' 'Dirty Hands,' 'No Exit,' 'Being and Nothingness'—I guess I've read about everything of Sartre's," the quiet man returned. The long body across the room snapped together and whipped around to face him. "Chronologically?" he cried.

The solid fellow replied wryly that he'd read them in the order he'd been able to get hold of them. His name was Arnold Kemp, and from that moment he began more or less to lead the class. (It turned out the lanky admirer of Gertrude Stein was not a parolee and had got into our section by mistake, but he stayed with us, expostulating, to the end.) When asked what he'd like to read, Kemp came up with Nathanael West—"He's really the father of the so-called black humorists." When it came to the vote, although we'd talked about Camus, Faulkner, and Dostoevsky, one after another opted for "that Nathanael West." So dazzled was I that it wasn't until I got home that I realized that most of the class had taken West for a Negro.

It was like that all term. Whenever I tried to find out "where we stood," I risked being thrown off balance by sounding

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View from Outside

Gay Power Comes To Sheridan Square

by Lucian Truscott IV

Sheridan Square this weekend looked like something from a William Burroughs novel as the sudden specter of "gay power" erected its heaven head and spat out a fairy tale the likes of which the area has never seen.

The forces of faggotry, spurred by a Friday night raid on one of the city's largest, most popular, and longest lived gay bars, the Stonewall Inn, called Saturday night in an unprecedented protest against the raid and continued Sunday night to assert presence, possibility, and pride until the early hours of Monday morning. "I'm a faggot, and I'm proud of it!" "Gay Power!" "I like boys!"—these and many other slogans were heard all three nights as the show of force by the city's finery met the force of the city's finest. The result was a kind of liberation, as the gay brigade emerged from the bars, bath rooms, and bedrooms of the Village and became street people.

* * *

Cops entered the Stonewall for the second time in a week just before midnight on Friday. It began as a small raid—only two patrolmen, two detectives, and two policewomen were involved. But as the patrons trapped inside were released one by one, a crowd started to gather on the street. It was initially a festive gathering, composed mostly of Stonewall boys who were waiting around for friends still inside or to see what was going to happen. Cheers would go up as favorites would emerge from the door, strike a pose, and swish by the detective with a "Hello there, fella." The stars were in their element. Wrists were limp, hair was primped, and reactions to the applause were classic. "I gave them the gay power bit, and they loved it, girls." "Have you seen Maxine? Where is my wife—I told her not to go far."

Suddenly the paddywagon arrived and the mood of the crowd changed. Three of the more blatant queens—in full drag—were loaded inside, along with the bartender and doorman, to a chorus of catcalls and boos from the crowd. A cry went up to push the paddywagon over, but it drove away before anything could happen. With its exit, the action waned momentarily. The next person to come out was a dyke, and she put up a struggle—from car to door to car again. It was at that

Continued on page 18

View from Inside

Full Moon Over The Stonewall

by Howard Smith

During the "gay power" riots at the Stonewall last Friday night I found myself on what seemed to me the wrong side of the blue line. Very scary. Very enlightening.

I had struck up a spontaneous relationship with Deputy Inspector Pine, who had marshalled the raid, and was following him closely, listening to all the little dialogues and plans and police inflections. Things were already pretty tense: the gay customers freshly ejected from their hangout, prancing high and jubilant in the street, had been joined by quantities of Friday night tourists hawking around for Village-type excitement. The cops had considerable trouble arresting the few people they wanted to take in for further questioning. A strange mood was in the crowd—I noticed the full moon. Loud defiance mixed with skittish hilarity made for a more dangerous stage of protest; they

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Front page of The Village Voice, July 3, 1969.

Photo: Universal Pictures

‹ Bros
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but they're men, too, and prone to the kinds of emotional repression that entails. Struggling with even the faintest forms of emotional intimacy, internalized expectations around performance of masculinity constrict their expressions at frequent turns throughout the film — often enough that it quickly becomes a recurring gag.

While the gendered pressures shaping the characters' more "bro-y" behavior are obvious, Bobby's vocal, almost maniacally insistent progressivism is often presented critically in a way that proves refreshing. At its best, "Bros" dramatizes this as its own kind of insecure performance, suggesting that Bobby's (mostly verbal and work-based) activist tendencies aren't wholly altruistic, wrapped up in unease regarding his position in the community and in the world.

As a queer character flush with historically rare forms of relative privilege, he enacts solidarity with an urgency that's not just driven by consideration, his attention to historical struggles scanning as a focus on difficulties that aren't quite his. In grasping at his own place within the LGBTQ+ community and seizing upon histories of hardship, there are moments where other, more marginalized characters in his orbit seemingly appear mainly to prop up his conception of himself.

But that unease seems to belong to more than just the character, bleeding into Eichner and co-writer and director Nicholas Stoller's script more broadly. The film spends a good deal of time chiding its gay white characters, leaving less time to flesh out its more diverse (and often thinly sketched) BIPOC cast. With press releases touting the film's use of authentic LGBTQ+ casting, the fact that even straight characters onscreen were mandated to be played by queer actors makes the move scan less as meaningful activism than as a flourish of PR. (Particularly distracting is the casting of Jai Rodriguez, from the original "Queer Eye," as Aaron's brother, who bears no racial resemblance to Aaron or his onscreen parents, in an act that comes off as eerie for its trivializing of such difference; a simple line about adoption could have made this click). What this and other clumsily inclusive gestures seems to express is an anxiety on the part of the film's backers about centering a movie today on a pair of cis, white, gay men.

It's the same tension that's played out throughout the film, which sees its two key threads — the thematic question of where gay white men fit into society now and, then, the matter of the starring couple's romantic prospects in that context — jockeying for space onscreen. In this regard, one scene in which Bobby takes a stage alongside his variously queer colleagues to promote the museum's attention to LGBTQ+ histories of struggle is particularly telling. While we glimpse a performance of solidarity that seems appropriate and right, it lasts just a few minutes before, in an act of writerly, actorly and character-based self-absorption I won't quite spoil, his peers are recast as backing figures for his own story and the film's romantic plot. Demonstrating just where exactly the film's real heart is, it's a prime case study of inclusion for the sake of optics over anything else.

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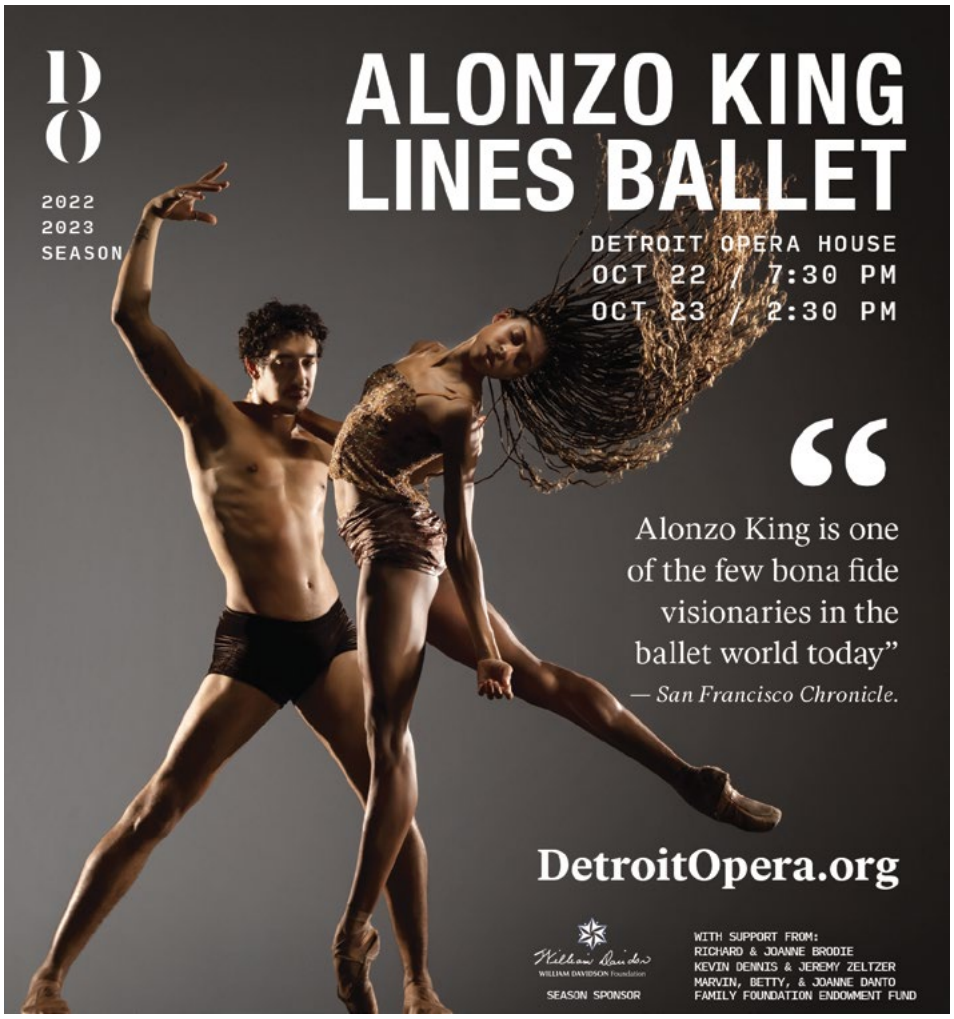

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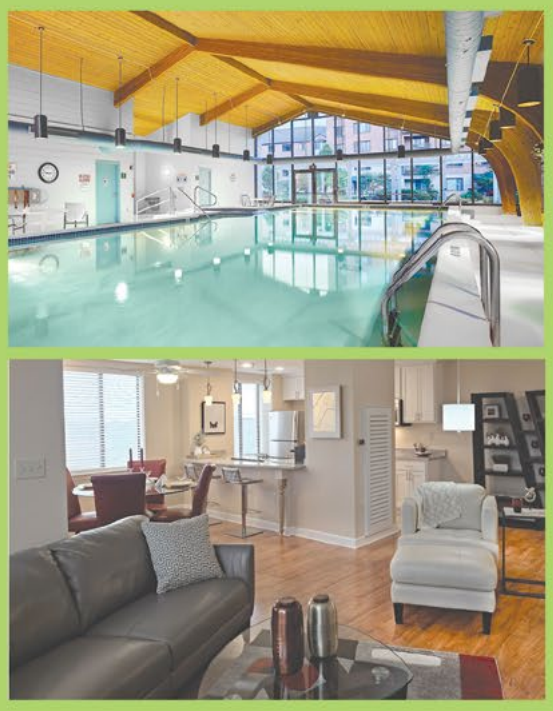

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Non-Binary Michigan Author Continues to Break Down Queer Fiction Barriers

Book Originally Featured 'MILF Book' As Subtitle

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Move over, Mrs. Robinson. There's a new cougar in town. And she's a lesbian.

You can find her in Michigan resident Meryl Wilsner's new novel "Mistakes Were Made," available Tuesday, Oct. 11 from St. Martin's Griffin. The book starts off with a bang — literally — when Erin Bennett, who came to her daughter's college for Family Week, unknowingly sleeps with a student and friend of her daughter's. The resulting story is a sort of "The Graduate" for queer, millennial readers.

"Mistakes" is only Wilsner's second published work, though they have been writing "since I can remember," they told BTL. "I used to write on an old, huge desktop computer that my mom had. I started before I reached double digits."

Wilsner wrote everything from poetry to a murder mystery, especially during lazy summers in a house on Lake Michigan. The scenery might have been idyllic, but Wilsner, who is non-binary, grew restless.

Wilsner wrote everything from poetry to a murder mystery, especially during lazy summers in a house on Lake Michigan. The scenery might have been idyllic, but Wilsner, who is non-binary, grew restless.

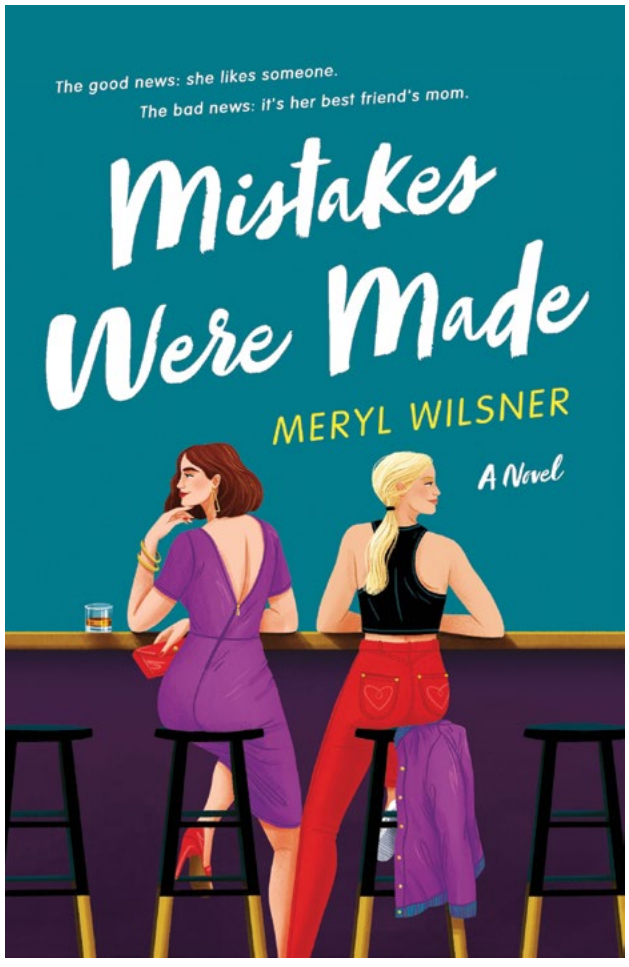
"I wanted to flee as soon as I got the chance," they said, noting that the Grand Haven community they grew up in had nearly 30 churches in it, none of which helped Wilsner feel at home. "I only applied to colleges outside of Michigan. I didn't want to be one of those people who stayed in their small hometown all their life."

So Wilsner went to Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon. After their four years were finished and they had earned a bachelor's degree in political science, they were surprised to hear the Great Lakes State calling them home. Today, Wilsner lives in Grand Rapids with their wife.

"I realized once I did flee how much I loved it here, and how much I love a lot of people in it as well," they said.

When Wilsner is not writing, they work by day as an executive assistant in a library "primarily because writing doesn't pay particularly well. I still have a full-time job. But writing is definitely my dream."

While Wilsner might not be rolling in moolah, they are making headway as an author. Their first novel, "Something To Talk About," was released in 2020. Described by the American Booksellers Association as "the slowest of slow-burn romances in the best possible way," Wilsner wasted no time in raising the steam level in their latest effort, beginning it with the aforementioned bang.



Wilsner explained that "Mistakes" was originally meant to be a one-chapter work of fan fiction.

"It was supposed to be this little one-shot piece … about these two people sleeping together," they said. But their friends encouraged Wilsner to do more with it. While working on the story, "Mistakes" took on the subtitle of "The MILF Book" to Wilsner and their team.

See **Meryl Wilsner,** page 22

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Meryl Wilsner

Continued from page 20

Meryl Wilsner. Courtesy photo

"I tried to come up with a title that we could abbreviate to MILF," they said. "I tried really hard. I'm thrilled with 'Mistakes Were Made.' I love the title. But 'The MILF Book' was always my joke."

Looking ahead, Wilsner's next two books are already sold (and were prior to the release of "Mistakes"). This is a remarkable accomplishment for a writer of queer fiction. And beyond those two, Wilsner said they have endless ideas for future books. In future works, Wilsner said they'd like to diversify their characters and offer representation of their own identities as someone who is non-binary and a person of size.

"Right now, there are so many queer female romances and there's so much more of a community, and I'm really grateful for that," they said. "I think it's similarly helping when it comes to fat characters and I hope that continues … race, ability, size, everything."

"I feel like fat characters are getting their happily-ever-afters way more than they used to," they continued. "Olivia Dade is an author that writes fat heroines beautifully. Jenny Howe and 'The Makeup Test.' That has fat characters as well. So, I think the genre is slowly moving in the right direction when it comes to sort of a lot of different marginalization."

As both a writer and a library employee, Wilsner said they are distressed by current efforts to ban queer books here in Michigan and across the country. "I am non-binary and that's not something that I knew was a thing when I was younger. So being exposed to different identities would have been really helpful. Representation matters, and kids need to see themselves."

Wilsner said the same is true for grown queer folk as well. "Even as adults, it's really meaningful to read about people like you finding their happily-ever-afters," they said. "It's important and it's something that gets overlooked in the adult sphere."

So important, in fact, that it has inspired their own writing.

"I never previously considered ever writing a non-binary character until I read another book someone else had wrote," they said. "I didn't even realize it was possible."

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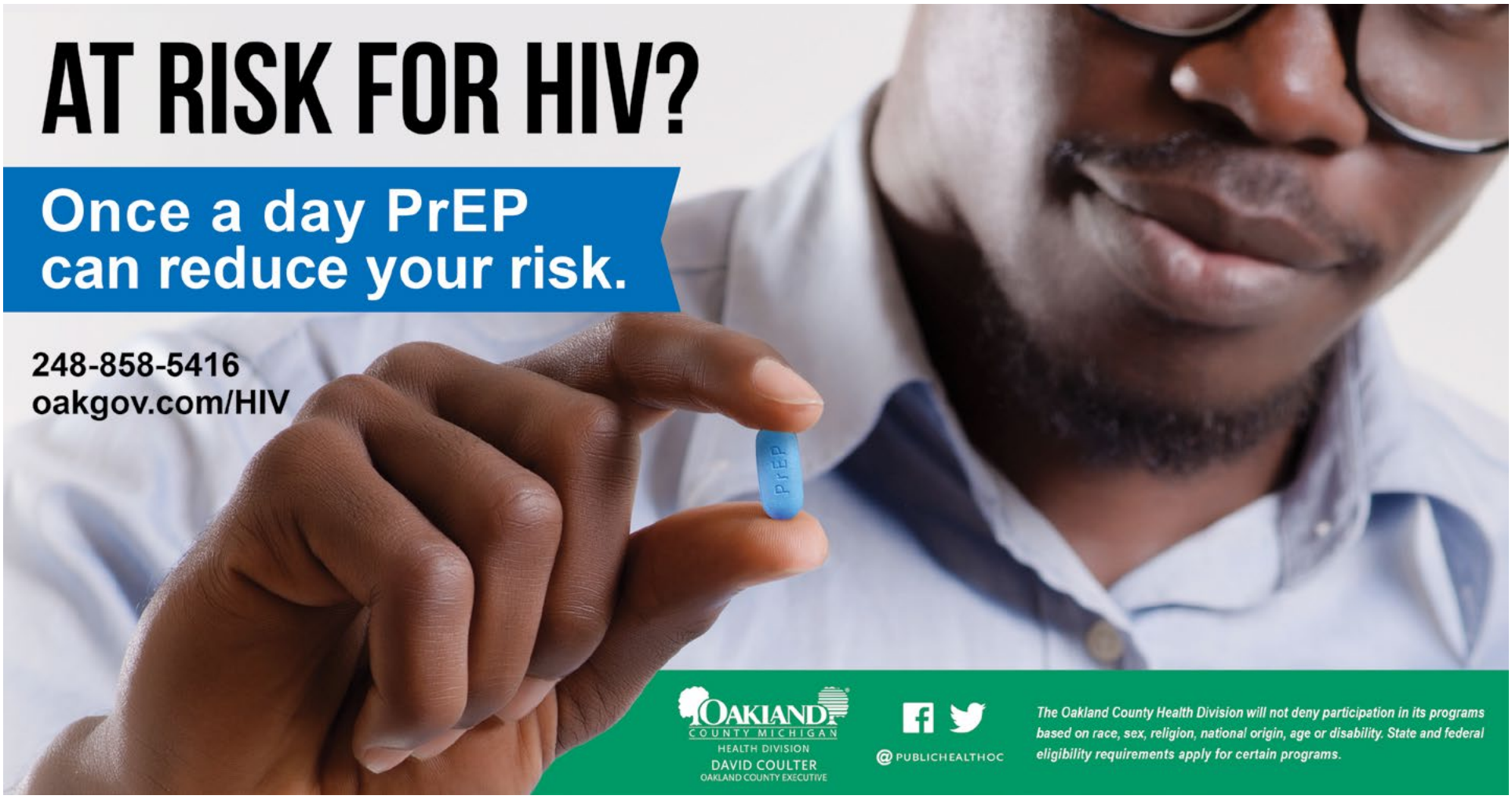
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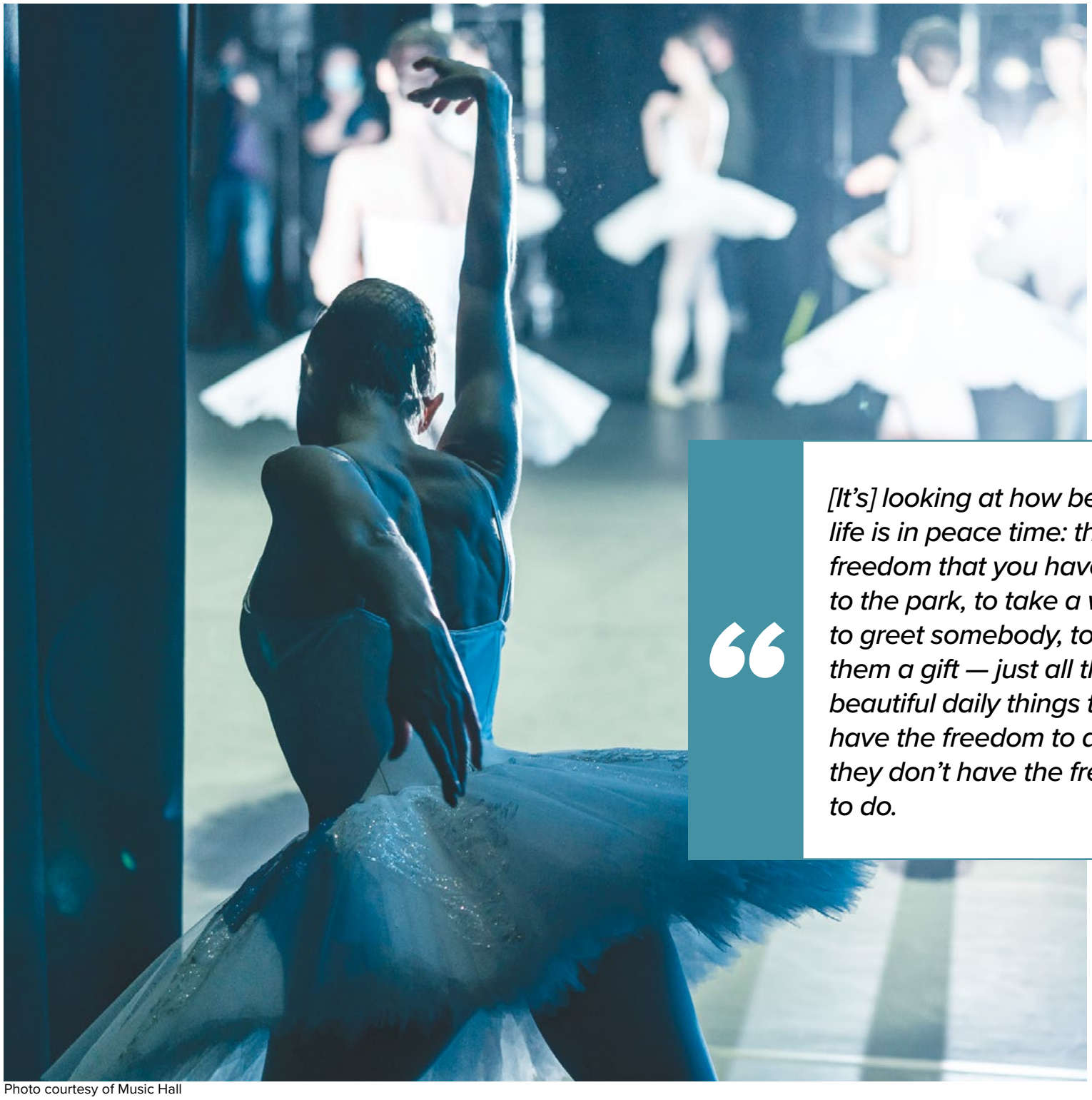
Kyiv Ballet
Continued from page 17



> *[It's] looking at how beautiful life is in peace time: the freedom that you have to go to the park, to take a walk, to greet somebody, to bring them a gift — just all these beautiful daily things that we have the freedom to do that they don't have the freedom to do.*

Photo courtesy of Music Hall

therapy remains legal. Gender identity beyond the binary is not recognized. Pew Research Center data from 2019 indicates that in Ukraine, 69 percent of survey respondents said society should not accept homosexuality, while 14 percent said it should.

Regarding any kind of positive expression of LGBTQ+ love in the ballet, Emson sounded cautious.

"Probably it would be good to have people from this area come out and increase the visibility of the [LGBTQ+] community, but unfortunately it never happened," Emson told BTL. "I believe dancers might be under a huge pressure of the homophobic environment."

The program closed with "Men of Kyiv," a celebration of traditional dance in which two "teams" of dancers, one wearing yellow t-shirts the color of the Ukrainian flag, the other in blue, tried to out-perform one another with their acrobatic displays. The dancers' athleticism impressed the audience, as did their unabashed pride in their heritage.

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Puzzle on page 29

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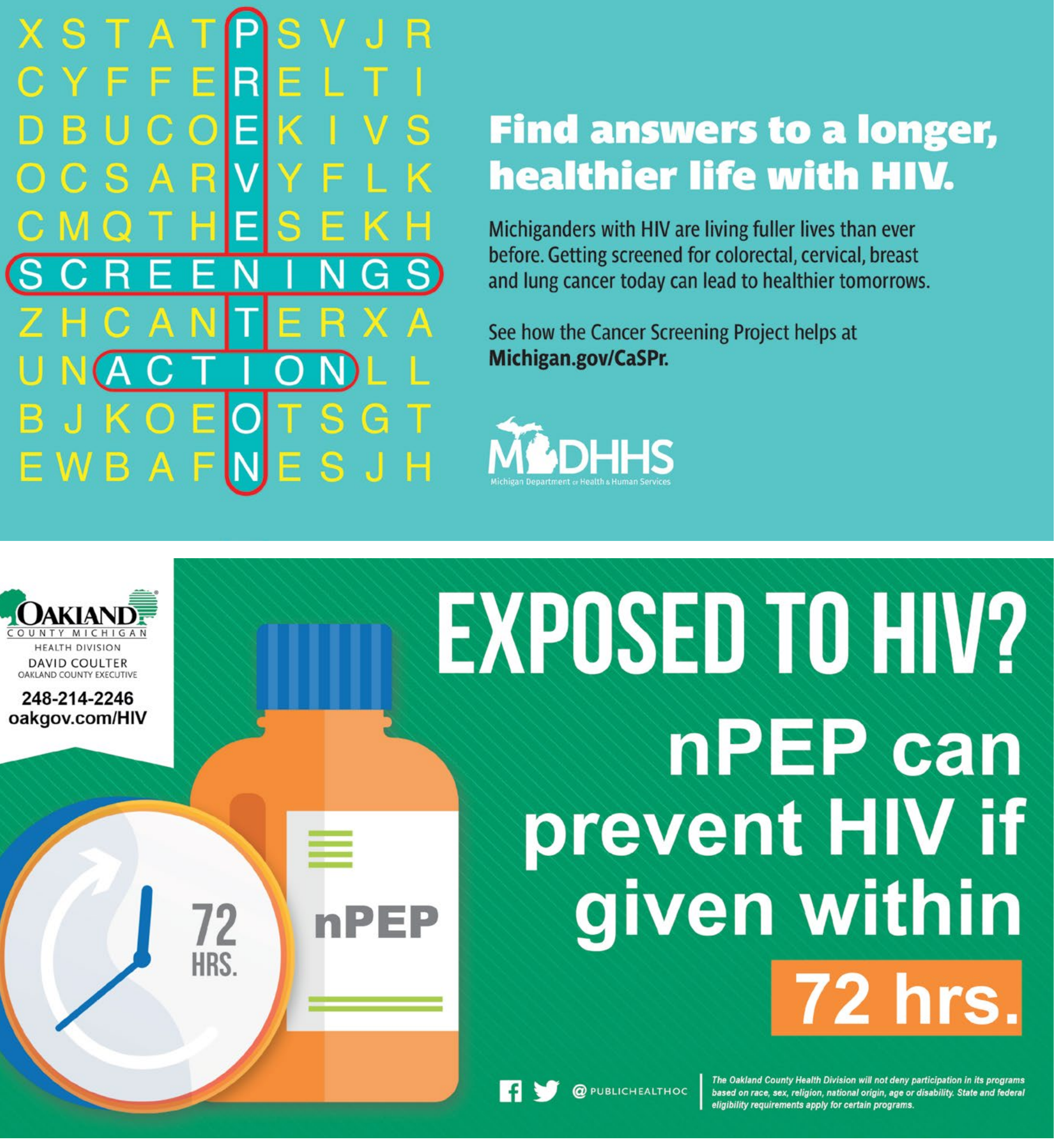
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Lachlan Watson. Photo courtesy of Syfy

The Non-Binary 'Sabrina' Star Contemplates Their Role On and Off 'Chucky' Set

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

I don't even ask Lachlan Watson about the Value Village cow onesie until halfway through our interview. But that's how Watson first appears on Zoom, at one point even standing up to extend their arms out to proudly show off every inch of bovine glory.

Queer kids find inspiration in this onesie, the 21-year-old actor tells me, for a very simple reason: It gives them permission to be whatever they want to be. But then again, everything Watson has done thus far — from starring as trans kid Theo on Netflix's "Chilling Adventures of Sabrina," to being openly non-binary, to their new role on "Chucky," embodying fan-favorite characters Glen and Glenda — does just that.

In the second season of the (very queer) "Chucky" series on Syfy, Watson plays the genderfluid kids of Chucky, the red-headed killer doll who promises to be "your friend till the end" and, since 1988, has demonstrated that he more or less means that in the most twisted sense. He co-parents Glen and Glenda with Tiffany Valentine (Jennifer Tilly), his murderous accomplice.

On a rainy day in New York, Watson spoke about bringing Glen and Glenda to (real) life, inspiring LGBTQ+ youth and what it's like to portray characters that represent a part of who they are.

Before starring in the show, were you a fan of Chucky?

I actually never watched Chucky when I was younger, because my mom thought that it would really scare me a lot. So that and "Wizard of Oz" were two movies that we never really watched because she thought that the Chucky doll would scare me and that the flying monkeys would scare me. And so I felt woefully out of the loop when the audition came through. Well, not the audition, but when my knowledge of Chucky came around, I kind of panicked because I felt so behind.

But the way that I got introduced to the franchise was through [openly gay Chucky creator] Don Mancini, because we did a panel together almost three years ago now. It was about queer representation in horror, and so I got to just listen to this guy that I didn't know talk so lovingly about not only the franchise, but about Glen and Glenda, because that was what came to mind when he was thinking about queer representation and horror — these two always fluid and queer characters.

And so my first introduction to Don and Chucky was by just basically listening to a proud dad talk about his two weirdo genderqueer kids, so it was really special. And so then to now get the audition and the role and be filming and working and to be part of the family of Chucky, after being introduced to it that way and being able to play those roles that he was talking so lovingly about, feels very special.

Did he have you in mind for the role from the start?

I think so. He never told me straight up, because obviously a lot of my friends auditioned for the role, a lot of people that I know. A lot of non-binary actors went out for this role, and so it wasn't just me. It wasn't a hard offer. It wasn't, "We just want you." I auditioned like everybody else, but I immediately heard back. It felt like the same day that I auditioned, we heard back, and they were like, "Well, Don wants to do a callback with you. Don wants to talk to you." Then it all just fell into place.

But I think he had an inkling on that panel however many years back. And this he has told me: that on that call, he saw

Glen and Glenda in me, and what I was talking about, speaking about being non-binary and genderfluid and being an actor, I think he had a lightbulb moment of, "This could work someday."

I'm wondering about the audition and about the human embodiment of these dolls.

The audition was tough because a lot of it was coded. I got the audition, nothing on it said Chucky. The roles weren't Glen and Glenda. It was Rob and Tracy or something like that, and it was "twins of a murderer and genderfluid," and it was very much hinted. I just knew the two twins are non-binary, and they're weird, and they're the child of a murderer.

I just gave them what I felt it should or could be, because these characters are completely new. They're essentially new characters in the franchise because we're kind of starting fresh, having them not remembering their past. So I think it did it justice to treat the characters like a new thing.

I imagine you must have a lot of flexibility in a kind of absurdist killer doll murderer show.

Oh, absolutely. It's not always so much pressure. It's more just like, you've got a big, open sandbox to splash around in. That's something really special about "Chucky" — the gates have been busted down, and now we're just telling crazy stories in a fun way and having fun with it.

What should people who know nothing about Glen and Glenda know going into this second season?

The characters are stumbling backwards into trying to figure out who they are through this second season and through this character arc as well. So the fun part is you really don't need to know that much going in, because they're just as lost as the audience could be, and they're slowly uncovering these truths about their past and who they are and who their parents are.

And so it's kind of convenient and very purposeful because it's been a long time since "Seed of Chucky" [in 2004], which is where Glen and Glenda originally appeared, and "Seed of Chucky" also was not received that well. People really didn't grow into it as much as I think they could have and as much as they're growing into it now. And so I don't think it's a given that people know this story. I think it's very, very helpful to have a clean slate and to allow the audience member to just jump in head first with us and just kind of stumble into unraveling this crazy set of memories. So luckily, I don't have to do too much explaining, because the explaining will be done throughout the season.

And for maybe some of the same reasons you didn't watch Chucky growing up, I'm guessing you didn't see "Bound"?

No, I did not. I desperately need to now, but I'm concerned that my view of Jennifer Tilly as my beautiful mother might affect my viewing experience of "Bound." [Laughs.]

It's possible, but you've also acted with both her and Gina Gershon now, so I feel like it's required viewing, right?

Yeah. Having Jennifer Tilly be my mom and Gina Gershon be Auntie Gina [in "Chucky"], I think it would be a little alarming to watch them make out and kill people, but possibly necessary nonetheless. Maybe I'll try and convince Jen to let me watch it with her and get her commentary.

It isn't so far off from what happens in the series, without giving anything away.

Not so far off.

What was that day on set like with both of them around?

It was a couple weeks, actually, having everyone around. My first impression of Chucky was season two, episode four, which is where all of the stars come out to play, and it was my first time working with everyone. It was my first time as Glen and Glenda. It was everyone's first time figuring out the twinning and how to shoot both twins at one time, and it was like being on a roller coaster for two weeks straight. It was insane. There were so many personalities, so many jokes, so many comments, so much to think about. But I wouldn't have it any other way, because it was easy coasting from there.

You only experienced some of the Glen and Glenda dynamic. Thankfully not all of it.

Yeah. Not that I know of, at least. I don't know what my parents do in their spare time. They could go off killing people, but something tells me they're not the type.

You play genderfluid in "Chucky" and you played a trans character in "Sabrina." How does it feel playing characters who identify in a similar way as you?

Ugh. That's a big question. It's hard to describe. It feels right. It feels correct to me that not only I got cast as a non-binary person to play non-binary characters, but it also feels very correct to me that a lot of non-binary actors that I know went out for the role. And as far as I know, I don't think they considered a lot of people who weren't non-binary themselves, which is in and of itself pretty revolutionary, so that feels more monumental than it should. It should feel like a 9-to-5, everyday job occurrence, that this is just how it works, but that's not always the case. So it feels really, really special, but I also don't know if it should feel as special as it does. I wish it was more common.

But it really does speak to how ahead of its time "Seed of Chucky" was and how revolutionary it is that these characters were established so long ago and are coming back to the screen now, because it couldn't fit better. It fits perfectly. It fits like a perfect little puzzle piece in today's society and the things that are important to casting nowadays. So I think it's very special, and I think it is a door opened to have this alignment.

> *I love playing non-binary characters, I love playing transgender characters, and I also love playing cis characters.*

But then again, personally, it just makes my job easier. I love playing non-binary characters, I love playing transgender characters, and I also love playing cis characters. I pretty much like just playing the whole spectrum. I find it fascinating. That's why I love acting. That's why I do what I do, is to be everyone. So I don't necessarily feel the need to limit myself to just characters that identify the way that I do, but it certainly makes my life a little easier to know that I can pull from my own lived experiences for a lot of what they go through.

While you're talking about visibility, you're one of the youngest, out non-binary actors. Do you have any memorable experiences with young queer people who have reached out to you to tell you what that means to them?

See **Lachlan Watson,** page 28

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Lachlan Watson in "Chucky." Photo: Syfy

Lachlan Watson

Continued from page 27

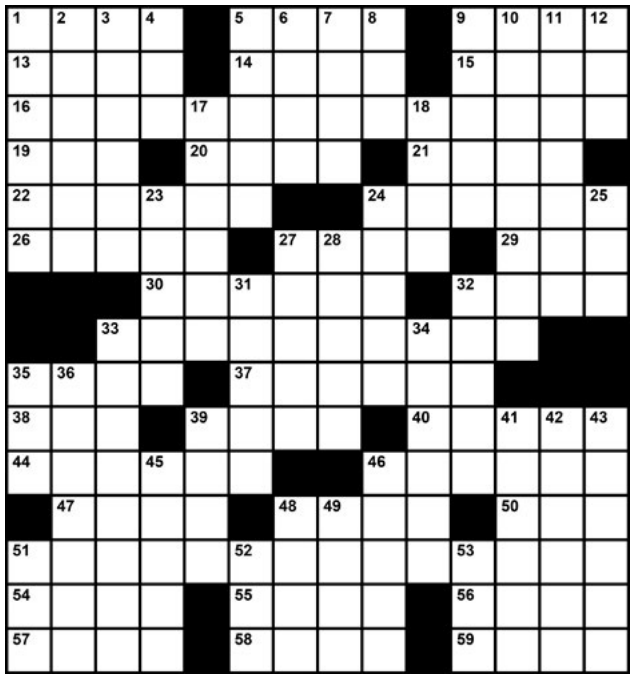
I grew up in North Carolina with my family. We all know how the American South is with young queer people. This was probably five years ago. I had just done “Sabrina”; Susie had become Theo. And this was a whole storyline that was happening. It was getting public attention. And I had started doing interviews, and I hadn't done many before then, but all of a sudden I had this boom of interview requests, and I thought they were incredible, but I didn't have a good scale for how far they went and how big the reach was for how many people were affected by my story, and by proxy, Susie and Theo.

Five years ago, my sister was babysitting in North Carolina, this adorable young thing who I think was 7 at the time. My sister was babysitting this person forever, and they were super, super sweet, and they were going by they/them.

And my sister told me about it, and I went to go help her babysit one night when I was home from “Sabrina.” This kid was adorable, super sweet, asking me all kinds of questions, but mostly just questions about my cow onesie or something. And their mom came home and had heard from Kinsey, my sister, that I was there helping her babysit. So she came home, and she immediately gave me a huge hug, and we stood in her kitchen for an hour talking, because she had read articles about me and interviews that I had done about my identity and who I was and growing up in North Carolina.

She said that those interviews that I did were solely responsible for the family coming to the idea that the kid was genderqueer, and that gave them the ability to bring this up to that kid. And the kid was like, "Absolutely, this is great. That's who I am," and it was because of an interview that I did that got to her somehow. And she had no idea that I was Kinsey's sister, she had no idea that I still lived in North Carolina. All she knew was that my sister's sibling was coming to help, and then all of a sudden, Lachlan Watson was in their home. And she almost started crying and just told me all of these incredible things about how my words, not even Susie, not even Theo, not even Sabrina, but me, my interviews, had changed their life and had changed the life of her kid.

It still gives me chills to this day. This was a long time ago, and I always think about that and how cool that was and how sweet it was. And I never saw them again. I went off to film the second season. We moved away from where we were, but that'll stick with me forever.



Common Cents Q Puzzle

Across

1 Wood split by 51-Across
5 Cock opening
9 Frasier's response to a client
13 Toronto gas brand
14 Nicky portrayer, in "Funny Girl"
15 Songwriter Holly
16 Start of a common sense saying from 51-Across
19 Vestment for Mychal Judge
20 What libraries do
21 Gossip from Ted Casablanca, e.g.
22 Go over proofs again
24 PAC contributor, often
26 LAMBDA Award-winning poet Eileen
27 Cruising greeting
29 Boat with a pair of bears
30 Buffy creator Josh
32 Capable of performing
33 End of the saying
35 Aussie greeting
37 "Drag Race" host
38 Grecian vessel
39 King's groups of games
40 Petty squabbles
44 Ted Casablanca item
46 Blood carrier
47 It made the Titanic go down
48 Russian singing duo
50 "Well, ___ You Evah"
51 Source of the saying
54 Navratilova, for one
55 Cinderella's coming-out party
56 Gardner of mystery
57 Coin for Kahlo
58 Prissy hissy
59 Not hard to get in bed

Down

1 Put back in the oven
2 "Jeffrey" director Christopher
3 Novelist Miller
4 Worldly fate
5 Want thy neighbor's ass, e.g.
6 Rainbow, to some
7 Piecrust ingredient
8 In need of lube
9 Alaskan language
10 Albee Pulitzer Prize work
11 Swank, in a 2009 flick
12 It may come before long
17 Cook of "The Maltese Falcon"
18 Jazz singer Anita
23 Disney duck
24 Jane of "Grace and Frankie"
25 Ref's call
27 Deuce follower, for Mauresmo
28 Targets for Diana Taurasi
31 Plumed wader
32 In darkness
33 Antonio who played Zorro
34 Beat at a meet
35 Pre-workout abs
36 Bounce around the WNBA
39 Love-making sound
41 Bogart's hat
42 Bells and whistles
43 Site of Gay Games VI
45 Cry at La Scala
46 Not erect
48 Govt. guy
49 Weight loss product
51 Biter of Caesar's girlfriend
52 Muscle Mary's pride
53 Fair grade

See p. 24 for answers

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‹ Pure Michigan
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North Pride — which is listed on the Pure Michigan LGBTQ+ page — and a business owner who sells Pride merch, Hilt noted that some stores on the page aren't queer-owned. Hilt believes Pure Michigan doesn't do enough to lift queer businesses and that areas of the state are too conservative to fully embrace LGBTQ+ communities.

"[One listed store has] nothing to do with the queer community," Hilt said. "They're nice people, but they don't even throw in a gay candy bar in June and try to profit off of it. Is there anything queer in Sleeping Bears Dunes? That article is obviously written by somebody who was told to write an article. That article stood out to me as kind of a joke. I'm not trying to get a pump for my business, but if you asked anyone in this region where to get Pride flags, either they don't know or they come to us."

> *"They're nice people, but they don't even throw in a gay candy bar in June and try to profit off of it."*

Still, Lorenz believes in Michigan's diversity. He even said he'd wager that Michigan is among the most diverse states in the country in terms of "people and places," but that Michiganders tend to live in pockets. He noted that assumptions hold back travelers and locals alike, like assuming Saugatuck is the only LGBTQ+ destination in the state, and that "if we're ever going to break through to be truly welcoming in every way, we need to put those assumptions aside to take a chance to maybe be disappointed, but maybe be filled with joy because we have been welcomed."

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